We saw only upto three birds together at any time. They were all in immature plumage, the ruff being brown, and were seen in a mixed flock of *G. indicus* and *G. bengalensis*, actively feeding at cattle carcasses or sitting on trees near the feeding sites.

PRAKASH RAO
ROBERT B. GRUBH
February 17, 1986. S. MURALIDHARAN

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11. OCCURRENCE OF REDBREASTED FALCONET *MICROHIERAX CAERULESCENS* (LINNE) IN THE SIMLIPAL TIGER RESERVE, ORISSA

A Redbreasted Falconet *Microhierax caerulescens* (Linnaeus) was sighted by us in the Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Orissa on 25 March 1987 at about 0700 hours. The bird was seen perched about 12 m high on a dead branch of a tree near a perennial stream close to the rest house in Upper Barakamara. The bird was readily identified by its diminutive size, broad white collar on the hind neck and a prominent black band through the eye.

The Redbreasted Falconet is not recorded earlier from Orissa. According to Ali and Ripley (1983) the species is present in the Himalayan foothills and terai from Kumaon in Uttar Pradesh to Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Assam. The westernmost record is from Nainital (79° 26' E) and the southernmost record from Sultanpur (26° 15' N). The Simlipal Tiger Reserve is quite south of the known range of this species.

VIBHU PRAKASH
March 31, 1987 ASAD R. RAHMANI

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12. MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF DEMOISELLE CRANES (*ANTHROPOIDES VIRGO*) AT VEER DAM

I have been studying the Demoiselle Cranes (*Anthropoides virgo*) for the last four years at Veer Dam Lake, situated 65 km from Pune on the Satara Road. Since 1984 the Demoiselle Cranes have been very regular visitors to this lake. The birds start arriving in small flocks of a few hundreds from the middle of November and their number is fairly large by January. They leave by the end of March. Every year about 2000 cranes settle here; but this year over 7000 arrived at Veer Dam. This sudden rise in numbers could be due to drought and drying up of the lakes in the north and more severe winters in the north.

The banks of the Veer Dam lake slope gradually towards the water, and are submerged in the rainy season. As the water level recedes the farmers from the neighbouring village start cultivating crops within the area. The cranes, on arrival at Veer, feed on the sprouting shoots of maize, wheat and gram, which are the chief crops of this area. Later, during February and March, the cranes feed on seeds of jowar, wheat and gram.

The farmers use different methods in order to protect their crops from the cranes, such as putting scarecrows in the field, trying to drive away the flock by shouting, throwing stones, waving towels and recently by detonating firecrackers. Sometimes the cranes were shot at but it was usually by outsiders, as the local people have no guns. But all these methods of protecting the crops are possible only during the day; since the cranes also feed in the fields at night, the damage to crops continues.

The number of cranes this year was large; consequently, so was the extent of crop damage. I was astonished this year, during my visit on 5 March 1987, to see ten dead Demoiselle Cranes. It was surprising that the cranes had not been carried away and eaten by the villagers. Some cranes were in a half-eaten state, and in a nearby area I found a dead kite and a dead Marsh Harrier.

I went to the neighbouring village and asked a few people there as to what could be the cause of death of these cranes. They said they did not know. However, there were small boys, around the 12 to 14 years old, who said that, during the last two days, a few cranes were seen with froth coming from their beaks, and that the deaths were due to ingestion of poison.

Among the dead birds there were two male specimens which were totally intact. It appeared that they had died not more than a few hours earlier, as their bodies had not shrunk, nor had they stiffened due to onset of Rigor mortis.

I got post mortems performed on both birds. One was an adult, the other a young bird. This proved that the birds did not die due to age. The birds weighed about 5 kg each. This proved that neither was sick, as sick birds are usually lighter in weight. The stomachs of both birds contained surprisingly large amounts (more than 2 litres) of water. This proved that the birds had become thirsty and drank a lot of water prior to death. The gizzard and stomach showed wheat grain and undifferentiated vegetable matter.

No tests were done to detect any evidence of organophosphorus in the tissue of these birds.

If the cause of death is accidental or deliberate poisoning from consumption of poisoned bait or crops sprayed with organophosphorus, it will be necessary to take steps to protect the cranes in the coming winter.

I would be interested in getting feedback on this note, particularly from naturalists who have been studying these cranes in the northern states. I would especially like to know if they had noticed similar deaths of these cranes after consuming crops sprayed with insecticides and whether there are any methods to detect organophosphorus in the dead birds.

April 7, 1987. SATTYASHEEL N. NAIK

13. BELLY-SOAKING AND NEST WETTING BEHAVIOUR OF REDWATTLED LAPWING, *VANELLUS INDICUS* (BODDAERT)

Belly-soaking is done mainly to transport water to the nest with eggs or young ones, and has been observed in the Charadriiformes (Maclean 1975), and I had evidence (though without personal observation) that nesting Redwattled Lapwing, *Vanelius indicus*. regularly wetted their nests from the clay pellets formed by wetting, I never had the chance to actually observe this behaviour till this year (1986). On 11 April 1986 I saw a pair sitting on the banks of a lake and drinking. Suddenly, one of them started dipping its belly repeatedly into the water, and then took off. I knew that the bird was nesting nearby and taking water to the nest, but I could not follow the bird as it flew out of view. On April 25th I discovered a nest just on the banks of the lake. This gave me the opportunity to study the belly- soaking behaviour. On April 28th I positioned my camera at a vantage point and walked towards the nest to disturb the incubating bird. The bird quietly moved away from the nest. I quickly retreated to my position and waited for it to return. Soon the bird walked to the water and started to drink, then soaked its belly 3-4 times before walking back to the nest. I quickly went to the nest to examine the eggs; they were copiously drenched with water. The belly-soaking behaviour was not seen during the early hours of the day when the temperature was low. During the early hours the incubating bird was not very anxious to return to the nest in a rush after the intruder left; while during mid-day, when the temperature was high, it returned to the nest immediately. If the intruder stayed longer the bird appeared visibly agitated and walked towards the nest, pausing and retreating. This behaviour was repeated with weak vocalization.

On May 10th I saw 3 other birds, which were obviously nesting somewhere nearby, doing belly-soaking before taking off from the lake. During that time of the year this lake is the only source of water.

The incubating bird, once relieved by its partner, goes to the water, drinks several times and starts preening for a while (15- 30 minutes) and then drinks again repeatedly. Just before taking off it does the belly-soaking 3-5 times. This observation was made several times on 4 birds.

On May 21st at about 1500 hrs I saw that two eggs had hatched. The parent birds repeatedly flew towards me noisily. As soon as I left the area one of them soaked its belly 3-4 times and went to the nest. I could clearly see through my binoculars the chicks drinking off the wet belly feathers of the parent before the parent sat to brood them.

Though belly-soaking has been reported by earlier observers (Dharmakumarsinhji 1964, Jayakar & Spurway 1965) I think that this is the first time that it has been photographed.

October 21, 1986. V. SUNDARARAMAN

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